

Colonel Walter Gresham House
(Bishop's Palace)
1402 Broadway
Galveston
Galveston County
Texas

HABS No. TX-2103

HABS
TEX
84-GALV,
25-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. TX-2103

HABS
TEX
84-GALV
26-

COLONEL WALTER GRESHAM HOUSE
(Bishop's Palace)

Location: 1402 Broadway, Galveston, Galveston County, Texas.

Present Owner: Catholic Diocese of Galveston.

Present Use: Historic House Museum.

Significance: This building was erected for Walter Gresham, a prominent historical figure of Galveston, a noted lawyer, Texas legislator and representative of the 53rd Congress.

The building itself is architecturally outstanding. It is complete throughout, in original state, including most interior finish and is an example of the Romantic Revival style of architecture characteristic of the late 19th century. Nicholas Clayton, the architect, was Texas' outstanding professional during that period.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1887-1893. The house was formally opened on January 1, 1893, even though minor details were still unfinished.
2. Architect: Gresham's affluence had rapidly developed and in 1887, the same year he was first elected to the Texas Legislature, he had commissioned the Galveston architect, Nicholas Joseph Clayton, to design for him a grand mansion.

Clayton's career had been bright since his arrival at Galveston in 1872 and during the interim he had been the architect of a number of monumental Galveston buildings. He was capable of the best work in the Romantic Revival styles of the time and he competently carried out this, the largest commission of his career.

3. Original plans and construction: Cost estimates of the mansion vary from contemporary guesses of \$250,000 to high of \$500,000. At the time, reporters were more conservative. The lowest cost reported, \$75,000, was the public figure released by the owner during the building's construction. Even this figure cannot be wholly relied on as owners often released lower figures to confuse the tax assessor.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Colonel Walter Gresham was born July 22, 1841 in King and Queen County, Virginia. His family were substantial planters and notable lawyers. Thomas Gresham, his grandfather, practiced law in Essex County in the state and Edward Gresham, his father, was trained in

law but devoted his time to the family plantation.

Gresham received his early education in private schools. In 1861 with the advent of the Civil War he joined Lee's Rangers in the Army of Virginia. In the autumn of that year while recuperating from wounds and illness he attended the University of Virginia, but recovered sufficiently to return to service in the spring of 1862.

He fought until the spring of the following year when he again entered the University and completed his L. B. degree by June. Once more he returned to service and was with Lee's forces upon surrender in 1865.

The family fortune was ruined by the war and Gresham moved to Texas, landing at Galveston December 31, 1866 with \$5.00. He soon opened a law office and in October of 1868 was married.

His career was well founded and in 1872, Gresham was elected District Attorney for Galveston and Brazoria Counties, a post he held for the following three years. At that time he was associated with the Galveston attorney, Colonel Walter L. Mann, but upon Mann's death in 1875, Gresham practiced alone.

It was in that year also that Gresham first became involved in the railroad business. He was one of the active leaders in the organization of Galveston citizens who acquired the charter of the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railroad Company. Gresham was a stockholder in the company and served as a director, its attorney and as a second vice-president. The road was finally sold in 1886 to the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad.

In 1878 Gresham formed a partnership with S. W. Jones, and the law firm known as Gresham and Jones occupied his interest for the following decade.

Gresham's political aspirations once again appeared, however, and in 1887 he was elected to the Twentieth Texas Legislature, a position he held for six years. During that time he served principally as chairman of the House Financial Committee.

During this period, Gresham also became actively involved in securing a deepwater harbor for Texas. He represented Galveston's interest in the Deep Water Convention at Fort Worth and Denver in 1888 and the following year at Topeka, Kansas. There he was made chairman of a special committee to encourage Congress to support the case. Success was achieved and in 1890 Congress appropriated the first funds to develop the harbor at Galveston.

No doubt these activities were important to Gresham's career for in 1892 he was elected as a representative of the 10th Congressional

District to the 53rd Congress. He served one term in this capacity and was defeated in a second attempt to gain the office.

Work was still needed at the turn of the century to develop Galveston's harbor and in 1900 Gresham was on the 15 member board of the Galveston Deep Water Commission. On September 8, 1900 a tropical hurricane devastated the city and Gresham was one of a three member committee appointed to devise measures and practical plans for the relief and reconstruction of the city. It was this committee that first developed the plan of commission government for large American cities.

In 1901-02 Gresham was president of the Trans-Mississippi Congress and vice-president for Texas of the National Rivers and Harbors Congress. In 1907 he drew up a proposal for the Trans-Mississippi Congress successfully requesting the National Congress to continue deep water improvements.

Gresham continued his active work in securing good water transportation systems for Texas and in 1914 was a member of the executive committee of the Inter-Coastal Canal Commission.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Clayton, Nicholas J. Office Diary (manuscript)

Clayton, Nicholas J. Office Account Book, 1887-89 (manuscript)

2. Secondary and published sources:

Brown, John. Indian Wars and Pioneers of Texas. pp. 349-50

Galveston Evening Tribune. "A Souvenir of Galveston"
March 1893

Galveston News. January 1, 1888

Griffin, S.C. Texas and Texans. pp. 1678-79

Prepared by: John C. Garner, Jr.
Director
Galveston Architecture Inventory
March 15, 1967

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The building is a three story masonry block of typical Victorian-era asymmetry. The entrance facade is flanked on the east by a round tower and on the west by a polygonal tower. The whole is elaborately decorated and heavily fenestrated. It is Romanesque in style; the ground floor elevated as a "piano nobile".
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The three story dwelling on a raised basement measures 88' x 104' in overall dimensions.
2. Foundations: Probably masonry piers.
3. Wall construction: Random work granite and stone; stone and polished granite trimmings.
4. Structural systems: Walls are load bearing masonry; floor and ceiling supports timber. Verandas are iron skeleton construction.
5. Porches: The main veranda is a one story cast iron porch that extends across the front entrance around the circular east tower to the east side facade. A small cast iron porch is provided on the west facade and a conservatory, also of cast iron frame, projects on the east side facade, being an extension of the dining room.

The verandas are supported by paired cast iron columns and have a cast railing both at the floor level and on the veranda roof, which is flat. Veranda floors and roof are tiled.

The conservatory is apse shaped, the pitched roof corresponding. It is glassed in.

6. Chimneys: Two chimneys, one on the east facade, one on the west, are opposite each other on the central block. Another chimney is located on the north wall on the west parlor extension, one on the north wall of the kitchen ell and one on the east gable of the dining room extension.

All are carried up a great height in the same material as the building and are highly ornamented and of various designs.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Double entrance doors are ornate with characteristic panels and moldings.
- b. Windows: Ground and second floor: Double-hung single light windows, often to the floor. Transom panels above vary - some decorated and opaque; some with lights. Openings formed by lintels.
Third floor: Double hung, various divisions in keeping with the medieval style. Most are located in an arcade or arched opening.

8. Roof: In all cases, a high pitch and covered with green-glazed tiles. Each articulated section separately roofed, hence a complex intersecting system.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor Plan: A typical Victorian plan. An entrance hall leads to a central rotunda. All rooms open onto the hall-rotunda area. At the southeast corner is the library with its curved alcove; adjoining to the north is the dining room which leads, again to the north, to a butler's pantry and kitchen. At the southwest corner is the front parlor and to the north adjoining is the back parlor. The upstairs plan follows the lower.
- 2. Stairway: A grand open stair of curved plan is located in the rotunda and leads to the second floor. A back stair adjoins the rotunda and connects the kitchen and butler's pantry with the basement and upper floors.
- 3. Floor: Ground story floors are of parqueting. Kitchen of tile.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Variously finished in ornate paneling, wainscot and paper.
- 5. Doors: Major doors on ground floor are of the double-sliding type with paneling.
- 6. Trim: Paneled jambs and soffits for major ground floor doors.
- 7. Hardware: Mortice locks, butt hinges.
- 8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: Originally coal burning fireplaces.

D. Site:

1. Orientation and general setting: House is located on Block 194, being the northwest corner of Broadway and Fourteenth Streets. House faces south.

Prepared by: John C. Garner, Jr.
Director
Galveston Architecture Inventory
March 15, 1967

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Galveston Survey was jointly sponsored by the National Park Service, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation and the Galveston Historical Foundation Inc., and developed under the direction of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). This structure was measured and drawn in the summer of 1967 under the direction of Professor Melvin M. Rotsch, project supervisor (Texas A&M), John C. Garner, Jr., architect (University of Texas), by student architects Michael D. Casey (University of Houston), Larry D. Johnston (Kansas State University), James E. Murphy (Texas A&M), and Gerald R. Rapp (Texas A&M). The historical data was written by John C. Garner, Jr., acting as the Director of the Galveston Architecture Inventory. The written data was edited for transmittal to the Library of Congress in the summer of 1980 by Kent R. Newell of HABS staff. The photographs were taken by Allen Stross in the summer of 1967.